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ABSTRACT

Terms basic to any understanding of East German culture and politics are defined in this paper. The items selected are grouped in five categories: (1) the state, (2) political and philosophical terms, (3) economics, (4) education, and (5) the family, ethics, and the arts. The author emphasizes semantic differences despite similarities to words in the lexicon of West Germany. (RL)

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BASIC EAST GERMAN WORDS, TERMS, NAMES
WHY KNOW THEM?

Elizabeth M. Mayer

Foreign language teachers believe that their discipline more than any other could contribute toward peace by showing the young what groups of people have in common and where they differ.

For the last 25 years teachers of German have been doing this largely by turning their attention toward West Germans who, with their 2000 years of traditions, offered rich enough food for thought. They happily noticed that the Federal Republic, being moulded more and more according to western designs, was becoming part of one world.

In the meantime other Germans were safely out of sight, while being reshaped as important parts of the eastern world. Now they have emerged. Should we not also take note of them in order to be able to fulfill our promises?

At first glance official words and terms used in East Germany may appear not to be too different semantically from those used in West Germany or the U.S.: "Demokratie" would seem to be 'democracy', "Frieden" looks like 'peace'. But is this really so? Can one simply translate them without simultaneously considering the cultural climate which surrounds them? Soviet cultures are linguistically monolythic and no deviations in thought or speech are permitted.

The words listed below represent fundamental concepts and institutions of official East Germany, examples of how language accomodates itself to the soil from which it sprang and becomes a vehicle for prevailing thought - in this case the ideology of Soviet bloc countries. Interpretations are based on authoritative sources and brought into focus for the western mind.*

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I. The State:

e Deutsche Demokratische Republik, DDR, 'German Democratic Republic,' 'GDR', is the official term for the central parts of former Germany in the Soviet Russian orbit. According to the constitution of 1968 it is a socialist state in which leadership rests in the hands of the Marxist-Leninist Socialist Unity Party, e Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands.

Hammer und Zirkel. Since 1955 the flag has shown a hammer and compass intertwined and surrounded by a wreath of ears on a background of black, red, and gold bars, representing the 'socialist workers' and peasants' state of German nationality', e Arbeiter-und-Bauernmacht deutscher Nation. The compass may be considered as pointing to a higher state of industrialization than the Russian sickle and signifies the alliance of working classes and intelligentsia.

e Demokratie; demokratisch. The words refer to socialist democracy or Diktatur des Proletariats unter Führung der Partei, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat under the leadership of the Party' in contrast to bourgeois democracy. Socialist democracy is considered to be democratic in a new way, in favor of proletarians and people without property, and dictatorial toward the bourgeoisie.

e Republik. Even though, according to definition, a republic is a form of government where the highest organ of the state is an elected body, all forms of government are considered the result of the class character of the respective society. Therefore the GDR, the result of the rule of the working classes under the leadership of their Party, is viewed as totally different from bourgeois republics which are termed exploiter societies.

r demokratische Zentralismus. 'Democratic centralism' is the principle according to which every Marxist-Leninist party, east and west, is run. Directed by an elected committee whose decisions are binding for everybody, all members work as efficiently as possible on their levels to implement them. Such centralization is intended to retain the leadership of the Party. The system has been taken over by most organizations. Usually elected committees are heavily weighted with party members.

e Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, SED, die Partei, is the name of the renamed Communist party after its merger with the East German

Social-Democratic party in 1946. It is the recognized guide on the road to socialism. Its leaders work in close cooperation with the Bruderparteien of the other socialist countries, the Bruderländer, especially the Kommunistische Partei der Sowjetunion, KPdSU. One frequently hears: Die Partei sieht alles, weiss alles; die Partei ist überall und hat immer recht. Four other parties acknowledge the leading role of "SED" and actively support the construction of socialism. Especially "SED" is viewed as fortschrittlich or progressiv.

s Zentralkomitee der SED, ZK, is the 'central committee of the Party' which guides and controls all its activities. This elected body in turn elects the members of the Politbüro and its Sekretariat to direct the Party's work between the committee's plenary sessions where the efforts of the "Politburo" and its secretary are discussed and confirmed. Walter Ulbricht has been Erster Sekretär, First Secretary of the Party, since 1953.

Walter Ulbricht, born in 1893, was one of the founders and leaders of the Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands, KPD, the communist party of the Weimar Republic. He spent the war years in the Union der Sozialistischen Sowjetrepubliken, UdSSR, the Soviet Union, and was returned to East Germany in 1945. Ever since he has seen to it that Party and state remained loyal to his protectors and their way to Marxist-Leninist communism.

e Nationale Front is a bloc of the parties and a mass organization which gives the unorganized a chance to cooperate with party members and socialism according to the principle: Plane mit, arbeite mit, regiere mit. They draw up e Einheitslisten, lists of single candidates, which, after extensive discussions with the electorate, are confirmed on election day.

r Staat. The 'state' or e einheitliche Staatsmacht, the uniform system of government, is considered the instrument of the working people, guiding them on the road to socialism-communism.

e Volkskammer is the highest elected body of the people which, in turn, elects the Staatsrat to do its work between sessions and cooperate with the Ministerrat, 'the committee of ministers' or heads of the various administrative departments. Walter Ulbricht has been the chairman, r Vorsitzende des Staatsrats, since 1960, while simultaneously being party secretary.

r Staatssicherheitsdienst, SSD, of the Ministerium für Staatssicherheit, the secret police system, works under leadership of the Party and in consultation with the Soviet secret police, KGB, to protect and support socialism.

e nationalen Streitkräfte, the military system, were built up under Soviet leadership. The complete Nationale Volksarmee, NAV, is directly subordinated to the Warsaw Treaty Organization.

e Deutsche Volkspolizei, DVP, VP,(Vopo,)is the politically trained police system.

e Deutsche Grenzpolizei is the border police, part of "NAV."

e Gesellschaft für Sport und Technik, GST, is a volunteer mass organization, preparing youth for better military service.

r Warschauer Beistandspakt. East Germany was admitted to the Warsaw Pact system in 1956. It provides a unified military command for the Soviet bloc nations with headquarters in Moscow.

II. Political and Philosophical Terms

r dialektische und historische Materialismus, Diamat, is the correct form of philosophical thought that considers all world views and ideas as superstructures and reflections of economic productive processes. Matter is understood as developing in a dialectic process, starting with inorganic substances, progressing to organisms, man, the human spirit, and leading through socialism to world communism as its culmination. "Diamat" is used as an instrument for change, zur Veränderung der Welt.

e Dialektik is a socialist science which assumes that all reality, including thought, develops through the struggle of opposing forces. New overcomes old while absorbing its useful qualities. Quantitative changes are supposed to appear eventually as qualitative changes. Application of this science is considered helpful for speeding up development of socialism-communism.

e Gesellschaftswissenschaften, Gewi, are not sociology of the western type but the study of man and society in the sense of "Diamat," which is required of everybody.

Naturwissenschaften und Technologie, 'natural sciences and technology,' are highly valued as basic productive forces, "Produktivkräfte", and claimed to be used for the benefit of all, in contrast to the west.

r Sozialismus is seen as the socio-economic form which, as the result of class struggle and revolution, follows capitalism and precedes communism. The dictatorship of the proletariat under the leadership of the Party has changed private means of production to people's property; exploitation, unemployment, economic crises and social insecurity have been abolished. Distribution of the total product follows the principle of: Jeder nach seinen Fähigkeiten, jedem nach seiner Leistung.

r Kommunismus is viewed as the world's final socio-economic form, the result of the conscious efforts of all. All means of production will be people's property, and all members of society will be socially equal. Free people united in self-government, whose primary instinct is to work for the good of all, will live according to the principle: Jeder nach seinen Fähigkeiten und jedem nach seinen Bedürfnissen. International equalization induced by Marxist-Leninist socialism and the Soviet Union will have led to the gradual fusion of nations.

e Revolution. Revolutions like die Grosse Sozialistische Oktober-revolution where political power is said to go from the hands of reactionary classes to those of progressive classes, are considered valuable: Lokomotiven der Geschichte. The concept of revolution is used figuratively for other major changes like e wissenschaftlich-technische Revolution.

r Sektierer is a person who deviates from the party line, swerving more to the left. He may not accept the system of democratic centralism or the leadership of Moscow.

r Kapitalismus is considered to be the last exploiting society which will be followed by socialism according to laws discovered by Marx and Engels. Its present and final form, r staatsmonopolistische Kapitalismus, is viewed as a system where monopolies and the state have been welded into one mechanism to control society for the benefit of financial oligarchies whose imperialistic wars, r Imperialismus, are seen as struggles for greater shares of world markets and military bases.

e Klassen. Even though, in socialism, there can be no exploited classes anymore, society still has a class structure. There are workers cooperative farmers, tradesmen, some Komplementäre, residual owners, sharing

their means of production with the people's state, and the intelligentsia. These are allied, verbündete Klassen, not antagonistische Klassen as in earlier systems, united by common consciousness, s sozialistische Bewusstsein.

r Faschismus is viewed as the final expression of the interests of die Monopolbourgeoisie when they can no longer force their will upon the resisting masses with the help of their system of bourgeois democracy. Supported by elements of the petite bourgeoisie they resort to terrorism. Italy under Mussolini, Germany under Hitler, and now the U.S. as well as the Federal Republic where matters are seen as still more complicated by Revanchismus, the desire of exploiting capitalism to regain lost territories, are considered fascist.

r Opportunist is a person denying the need for revolutionary removal of the capitalist order. He may be a worker under the influence of bourgeois ideology or a rightist social democrat, allowing himself to be exploited by cooperating with capitalist imperialism.

r Revisionist, r Versöhnler, are designations for persons deviating from the party line toward the right by pointing to changing social conditions and asking for liberalization.

ein Spalter Deutschlands is the bourgeoisie of West Germany, accused of having prevented the creation and union of a socialist Germany.

r Idealismus is any form of philosophical thought that considers the human spirit to be more than the result of economic productive processes. It is said to develop in societies where physical and mental work are performed by different groups and where exploiters conceal reality by screens of religion and idealistic philosophy.

e Reaktion is resistance of outdated groups, like the Monopolbourgeoisie in USA and West Germany, to rising progressive classes.

e proletarische Parteilichkeit. 'Proletarian bias' is considered the prerequisite for any judgment, since only the workers and their Party are not exploiting classes.

III. Economics

r Rat für Gegenseitige Wirtschaftshilfe, RGW, 'Comecon,' the 'Council for Mutual Economic Aid' of the Soviet bloc countries was started in 1949 under

Soviet leadership with a Sekretariat in Moscow. While 'UdSSR" is being developed universally, other countries, like East Germany, are specializing along certain lines.

e nationale Wirtschaft. The national economy is imbedded in the Soviet bloc economy. Through plans, e Perspektiv und jährliche Planung, the Party's central committee, after agreement with respective Soviet leaders and Comecon, specifies East Germany's tasks for the construction of world socialism. They are then implemented according to the principle of democratic centralism. Confirmed plans are binding.

s Neue Ökonomische System der Planung und Leitung was started in the early sixties for better implementation of the Party's central plans. Through a new book keeping and wages-reward system the population of all levels was persuaded to work more actively on increasing production and efficiency. Die Planerfüllung improved, r Planverlust diminished, and work quotas, s Plansoll, became more tolerable.

e materielle Interessiertheit is the human desire to earn much and have a high living standard. The state tries to balance it with gesellschaftliche Interessen, the political and economic interests of a Comecon state.

e ökonomischen Hebel, 'economic levers', are the system of wages and rewards which channels people into desired directions according to the principle: Was der Gesellschaft nutzt, muss auch für den Betrieb und den einzelnen Werktätigen gut sein.

r materielle Anreiz is an incentive to work, like money.

r Betrieb is an economic and legal productive unit, mostly state owned.

s sozialistische or gesellschaftliche Eigentum, Volkseigentum, 'People's' or 'state property', is the basis of the socialist system of production and said to more and more preclude exploitation of man by man. It may take the form of r volkseigene Betrieb, VEB, (often linked into combines, Vereinigungen Volkseigener Betriebe, VVB), or e Handelsorganisation, HO, state owned retail shops. There still are various types of cooperatives with names such as: e landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaft, LPG; e Produktionsgenossenschaft des Handwerks, PGH; e Produktionsgenossenschaft werktätiger Fischer; e gärtnerische Produktionsgenossenschaft. Some Einzelbauern, who

refused to join collectives, are left. In the age of communism everything will be common property.

e Produktivkräfte are everything that is needed to produce an existing level of the economy: tools, resources and, especially, people with their knowledge and skills.

r Freie Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund, FDGB, is not a labour union in the western sense but considered the uniform organization of the ruling workers' classes including employees and members of the intelligentsia under the leadership of the Party, organized according to the principle: ein Betrieb, eine Gewerkschaft. It mobilizes the workers to fulfill the plans, while at the same time looking after their well-being.

r Werktätige is a Russian concept, referring to every citizen of the workers' and peasants' state who earns his living without exploiting others as is said of the bourgeoisie.

r Genosse is a fellow socialist. Party members speak of one another as "Genosse."

r Kollege. Most "Werktätige" address each other as "Kollege."

IV. Education

e Erziehung is defined as the process of passing on skills, knowledge, modes of thinking, and social behaviour. Socialist education, therefore, must serve the interests of the working classes, giving everybody the same basic chances, while bourgeois education is said to use s Bildungsprivileg in order to retain different classes to serve bourgeois imperialism. The goal of socialist education is r sozialistische Staatsbürger and r neue sozialistische Mensch. They are to develop qualities such as allegiance to socialist ideals, constancy, courage, modesty, brotherly love of the people, confidence in victory, loyalty to the party, implacable hatred of the enemies of the people, love of the Soviet Union, solidarity with the peoples fighting for liberation, and an iron will to further socialism.

e Kollektiverziehung. All education is training to think and act collectively. This is considered necessary because the development of a socialist society can be assured only by the collective action of all and because the interests of all coincide. Individualism is frowned upon.

Collective education is carried out in a very extensive educational system, using the following terminology: e Kinderkrippe, r Kindergarten, "e zehnklassige, allgemeinbildende polytechnische Oberschule," Berufsausbildung, Hoch und Fachschulen, Erwachsenenbildung. erweiterte Oberschule

e Bildung is the result of this education and, in this sense, East Germany is considered eine gebildete Nation, a 'cultured, educated nation.'

e zehnklassige allgemeinbildende polytechnische Oberschule is the uniform school required of all, where the basic mental and manual skills needed in a socialist state within the Soviet orbit are taught. Russian is the required second language. Weekly work in factories and agriculture accompanies training in the upper grades. Membership in parallel youth organizations is mandatory for success.

e Jugendorganisationen are socialist mass organizations. e Jungpioniere, of classes 1-3, and e Thälmannpioniere, of classes 4-7, prepare youth for voluntary entrance into the Freie Deutsche Jugend, FDJ, the Party's official youth organization. "FDJ" trains youth as co-workers of the Party for socialist efficiency and competition, for cooperation with youth organizations of the socialist camp as well as champions of socialist peace and challengers of bourgeois imperialism. "FDJ" is run according to the principle of democratic centralism. It is represented in the "Volkskammer," the 'people's parliament.'

e Jugendweihe, 'consecration of youth,' is the lavishly celebrated official act of accepting youth of the 8th grade into the socialist community after a winter's training. It is modeled after the Christian ceremony of confirmation, but the vow binds youth to faith in socialism, the fight for socialism and for socialist peace. Each child receives: Weltall Erde Mensch: Sammelwerk zur Entwicklungsgeschichte von Natur und Gesellschaft, his book of reference for the official philosophy.

e Bewusstseinsänderung. The concept indicates that bourgeois thinking must be changed to socialist consciousness.

s Kollektiv sozialistischer Arbeit is, unlike teamwork, a group united by common socialist consciousness, working and acting together. A book may be written by an Autorenkollektiv, research be done by a Forscherkollektiv.

e Kader are 'elite collectives,' frequently of party members.

e Arbeit. Work to further socialism is the raison d'être for everybody in the workers' state. The official Gesetzbuch der Arbeit, the 'code of work', considers it the moral duty of all able bodied men and women to assist creatively in the execution of official plans. It is a matter of honor, not exploitation.

e Brigade is a collective of workers with a leader, the Brigadier, to increase productivity and the quality of work. Brigaden as well as most other units of endeavour are in officially directed constant competition with each other, named sozialistischer Wettbewerb, frequently making public pledges as to what they want to accomplish, e Selbstverpflichtung. On the highest levels there are competitions and Spartakiaden between the best groups of the various socialist countries.

V. Family, Ethics, the Arts

e neue Familie. Unlike the bourgeois family which is viewed as based on private property in the hands of the man, the 'new socialist family' is considered to be the smallest cell of the socialist state, the result of the absence of private property, where family interests are one with those of all. Man, wife and children are said to respect and love one another on the basis of equal social rights, and to cooperate in creating the new man with socialist consciousness and the urge to work for the people. Privileges and duties of the family are set down in the official Familiengesetzbuch, the 'family code,' which permits the state to interfere if basic principles are infringed upon.

e sozialistische Moral is the morality of the new man as formulated in 10 Gebote der sozialistischen Moral, the ten commandments announced by Walter Ulbricht and appearing in the program of the party.

r reale Humanismus. Since the various concepts of humanism are considered the result of the needs of different classes, humanism based on Marxism-Leninism is viewed as the real humanism of workers.

e Freiheit is not to be mistaken for the bourgeois concept viewed as the result of the will to exploit. It is seen as necessity appearing as freedom when a person accepts the functioning of social laws according to which the dictatorship of the proletariat replaces bourgeois imperialism. Then he is free to cooperate. Joining a collective, a party organization, and working for socialism are the freedom to do what is most progressive.

e Kultur. 'Culture' in all its ramifications is considered the superstructure of economic and class conditions. Every new class is said to develop the preceding culture in a way suitable for its purposes. German socialist literature and art, therefore, are considered the expression of the ruling workers' classes. Following the Bitterfelder Weg, they are to support education, thus helping to perfect die gebildete sozialistische Nation.

r Bitterfelder Weg is a program, started in 1959, to overcome the separation of art and life and to develop a socialist national culture. Artists and writers were asked to show realistically the development of the new socialist society, and workers were persuaded to join in the effort on their own level.

r Frieden. Since socialism is viewed as the only non-exploitative system, peace, as the condition in the relationship of countries which precludes the use of force, is considered attainable only after private ownership of means of production has been abolished everywhere.

According to western definition the truly educated man is aware of his locus in the universe. Knowledge of East German words adds another dimension to such awareness.

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*Kleines politisches Wörterbuch, ed. G. König, et al. (Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1967)

SBZ von A bis Z, Ein Taschen-und Nachschlagebuch über die Sowjetische Besatzungszone Deutschlands, ed. Bundesministerium für gesamtdeutsche Fragen (Bonn, 1965)